

Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Workshop

Corridor Strategies

Thursday, October 4, 2007, 9:30 – 12:00
Southern California Association of Governments
818 West Seventh Street, Los Angeles CA 90017

Attending Elected Officials

Alan Wapner, Ontario
Margaret Clark, Rosemead
Debbie Cook, Huntington Beach
Richard Dixon, Lake Forest
Carol Gross, Culver City
Robin Lowe, Hemet
Paul Nowatka, Torrance
Linda Parks, Ventura County
Jeff Stone, Riverside County
Greg Pettis, Cathedral City
Deborah Robertson, Rialto
Larry McCallon, Highland
Mike Ten, South Pasadena
Art Brown, Buena Park
Gary Ovitt, San Bernardino
Harry Baldwin, San Gabriel
Jim Aldinger, Manhattan Beach
Glen Becerra, Simi Valley
Lou Bone, Tustin
Stan Carroll, La Habra Heights
Leslie Daigle, Newport Beach
Lawrence Dale, Barstow
Gene Daniels, Paramount
Judy Dunlap, Inglewood
Paul Eaton, Montclair
Troy Edgar, Los Alamitos
Lee Ann Garcia, Grand Terrace
Paul Glaab, Laguna Niguel
Keith Hanks, Azusa
Tim Jasper, Apple Valley
Ron Loveridge, Riverside
Barbara Messina, Alhambra
Larry Nelson, Artesia
Chris Norby, Orange County
Marsha McLean, Santa Clarita
Sid Tyler, Pasadena
Dennis Washburn, Calabasas LVMCOG
Keith Millhouse, Westlake Village
David Gafin, Downey

Attendees

Lori Abrishami, Metro
David Akers, California Nevada Cement Association
San Alameddine, Caltrans
Jamen Amato, OCTA

Jean Armbruster, LAC Dept of Health Sciences
Jane Berner, City of LA Council District 13
Helene T. Bibas, LA City Planning
LeAnn Braun, City of LA Council District 3
Tamara Campbell, City of Irvine
Rose Casey, Caltrans
Anita Cerna, City of LA Planning
Deborah Chankin, GCCOG
Jenny Cristales, City of Pasadena DOT
Jill Crump, City of Torrance
Susan Desantis, DeSantis Consulting
Michael Fitts, Endangered Habitats League
Angel Fuertes, City of Aliso Viejo
Ilene Gallo, Caltrans HQ
Bob Ham, IVAG
Alfonso Hernadez, Sunline Transit Agency
Suru Hunter, City of Colton
Bill Jacobs, City of Irvine
Mike Jenkins, Lakewood
Marianne Kim, Auto Club
Mike Labudzki, City of Burbank
Paula Lantz, City of Pomona
Michael Litschi, OCTA
Estineh Mailian, City of LA Planning
Catherine McMillan, CVAG
Brad Miller, Town of Apple Valley
Ameal Moore, City of Riverside
Sharad Mulchand, LA Metro
Peter Noonan, Beverly Hills/ Westside Cities COG
W. Rehman, LA Department of Public Works
Dilane Rodriguez, City of LA Council Deputy
Tracy Sato, City of Anaheim
Ty Schuiling, SANBAG
Eyvonne Sells, AQMD
Eric Shen, City of Pasadena DOT
Gail Shiimoto-Lohr, OCCOG
Maria Souza-Rountree, City of LA /CLA
Kent Strumpell, LA County Bicycle Coalition
Amada Ta, City of Pasadena
Debra Varnado, VCOG
Carla Walecka, Carla Walecka Planning
Leann William, Caltrans
Robert Wong, Caltrans
Linda Wright, Caltrans Public Transportation
Fred Zohrehvand, City of Glendale

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Opening Remarks

Alan Wapner, Chair of the Transportation and Communications Committee (TCC), announced that the last of two workshops on Goods Movement Strategies was held the previous day. The next workshop will focus on Transportation Finance and will be held on Thursday, October 11, 2007. Mr. Wapner emphasized that the 2008 RTP is subject to much more fiscal constraint than in previous years. A representative from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will be present at the October 11th workshop to discuss the new federal requirements. Also, USC Professor Genevieve Giuliano will be presenting on the topic of privately subsidized transportation.

Mr. Wapner referred to the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Framework developed by SCAG staff, a graphic which resembles a bull's eye. At the very center of the circle is the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP), followed by an outer circle that is the core RTP. The core RTP is the document that is submitted to the Federal Government and is required to meet environmental requirements and adhere to financial constraints. Finally, the outermost ring is the Strategic Plan, which contains projects that are not ready for implementation. Projects have to be listed in the Strategic Plan before they can be considered in either the RTIP or RTP. These projects cannot continue with an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Mr. Wapner clarified that projects in the Strategic Plan that identify a source of funding require an amendment from SCAG to be placed in the RTP.

The series of ongoing RTP Workshops is intended to discuss and prioritize projects in each element and be used to finalize a draft master list of projects that will be included in the 2008 Draft RTP. Mr. Wapner stated that SCAG will present the draft master list of projects at the last workshop on October 25, 2007. Following that workshop, SCAG will present the Draft RTP to the TCC on November 1, 2007.

Public Comment Period

Mr. Wapner requested formal comments that were more on the content and design of the workshop. Mr. Wapner stated that comments could be made throughout the discussion, all interested parties were welcome to comment at any time, but requested that people come to the front of the room and use the microphone so that it would be recorded and audible for those on video and teleconference.

Policy Discussion Matrix: Project # 1: Operations and System Preservation

Hasan Ikhata, SCAG Director of Planning and Policy, explained that for the RTP to be financially constrained, revenue funds must be reasonably expected. Therefore, SCAG makes several reasonable assumptions about revenue sources, including revenues generated as a result of the passage of Lowenthal's SB 974, and increased revenue from the gas tax. Mr. Ikhata further explained that SCAG accepts all priority projects that the transportation commissions provide to SCAG, and the issues being discussed today have to be agreed upon to be included in the Plan.

In respect to Project #1: Operations and System Preservation, SCAG staff recommended increasing the level of funding in the Core RTP by up to 40% (\$10 billion) of the unfunded need, recognizing capital investment tradeoffs. Mr. Ikhata stated that drivers spend \$1,500 more annually on maintenance because roads are not adequate. As a region, we can pay now or pay a lot more in the future. There is a commitment of about \$40 billion for system preservation between now and 2035, but there is also an estimated \$26 billion need that has not been fulfilled and remains unfunded. However, we can consider revenues from the gas tax and the passage of SB 974 as potential funding sources.

An individual expressed difficulty in making a recommendation because he could not see the projects that are dropping off the list as a result of accepting system preservation.

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Mr. Wapner clarified that each RTP Workshop focuses on one element and that the Regional Council convenes to recommend moving a project to the RTP or to the Strategic Plan. He further stated that no one will know the amount available for transportation projects until the October 11th finance workshop.

Debbie Cook, Huntington Beach, reiterated that voters would prioritize system preservation and maintenance. She also stated that the Region should develop transportation plans based on future energy sources, and not on cheap and abundant fossil fuels. She further added that Projects #2-6 should not be funded because they do not consider future energy sources.

Consensus was reached by members to invest in preserving the existing system before considering new capacity projects. Mr. Wapner confirmed that there was concurrence to move Operations and System Preservation to the RTP.

Policy Discussion Matrix: Project #2: I-710 Tunnel

SCAG staff recommended including the I-710 Tunnel in the Core RTP. Mr. Ikhata referred to I-710 tunnel as the number one capacity project for the Region because it has been congested for so long. The 2004 RTP listed this as a project but not as a tunneled project. Mr. Ikhata informed the Board that he attended a meeting in Duarte last week to discuss potential public-private partnership funding opportunities for the I-710 Tunnel, and felt encouraged that there are existing private entities willing to provide funding.

Mr. Wapner confirmed that there was concurrence to move the I-710 tunnel forward to the RTP.

Policy Discussion Matrix: Project #3: High Desert Corridor

SCAG staff recommended including the High Desert Corridor in the 2008 RTP, but raised concerns over funding. San Bernardino County has committed \$70 million to the project, whereas LA County has committed zero dollars. Mr. Ikhata added that SAFETEA-LU designated this as a national corridor. SCAG expects to see a public-private partnership fund the effort. Nevertheless, the project still requires public commitment in order to move forward. Benefits of the project include relieving truck congestion, providing an east-west connection between two high growth areas, allowing through traffic to bypass the congested urban core, and increasing capacity.

Mr. Wapner requested to hear from Metro about its position on the project.

Lori Abrishami, Metro, responded that Metro's Board won't be reviewing the information until November 29th as Metro continues to work on its long range transportation plan.

In response to a question about how much SCAG considers an appropriate amount for Metro to commit for the project, Mr. Ikhata stated that any commitment from Metro is welcome.

Ty Schuiling, SANBAG, clarified that the \$70 million commitment is for the segment east of US-395 to I-15. The full High Desert Corridor starts east of I-15, crosses the I-15 north of SR-18 intersecting I-15, hits US-395 at the intersection of US-395 and the purple line on the map shown. The part that is expected to be built first is between I-15 and US-395 that provides access to the former George Air Force Base, now SCLA. The public partnership portion is seen in purple to the west of US-395. The \$70 million is largely a commitment from Victorville, although SANBAG is providing funds as well. Mr. Schuiling expects industry to grow rapidly in Victorville, pointing to studies that predict warehousing needs to double in the Region in order to accommodate the growth of goods.

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Ms. Cook urged others to reconsider this project. The Region has experienced over fifty years of road construction. She referred to SCAG as being schizophrenic because it pushes strategies such as Compass 2% and also supports projects like the High Desert Corridor, which promotes sprawl.

Leann William, Caltrans, applauded the High Desert Corridor as a road connecting two highly growing areas, especially knowing that I-15 is a “lifeline” for earthquakes.

Mr. Schuiling pointed out that they expect the logistics industry to grow rapidly into the Victorville Valley. Studies show that the amount of warehousing will need to double to accommodate the throughput that is expected; there is no room in LA County outside of the Antelope Valley or Miraloma areas.

Michael Fitts, Endangered Habitats League, urged the Region to look at the benefits and costs of goods movement and commuter traffic separately. He pointed out that there is an assumption of residential growth in the adjacent areas to the project, but there is also open space value.

Kent Strumpell, LA County Bicycle Coalition, asked that the consideration of \$5 billion be given to a transit corridor rather than a freeway corridor. This would be consistent with SCAG’s 2% Strategy.

Mr. Wapner concluded that the High Desert Corridor will proceed into the RTP contingent upon support from Metro and funding from private sources.

Policy Discussion Matrix: Project #4: CETAP Riverside County – Orange County Corridor

Mr. Ikhata noted that there was a correction to be made to the matrix. There is not a \$925 million commitment from OCTA to fund CETAP. Given this new information, SCAG staff recommends to take the project out of the RTP and place it in the Strategic Plan due to funding issues. Mr. Ikhata expressed support for the corridor, but emphasized that SCAG cannot include it if the Orange County and Riverside County transportation commissions do not commit funding. This project may also have to consider a public-private partnership.

Robin Lowe, Hemet, reminded colleagues that this project is currently being fast-tracked by the White House and the U.S. DOT and has federal funding. It was in the 2004 RTP and it would jeopardize the entire effort to relieve SR-91 congestion if the project was not placed in the 2008 RTP.

Jeff Stone, Riverside, strongly supports the project and suggests that Riverside is cooperative in moving this forward, and that the benefits of the project to Orange County would be enormous. He would like to see Orange County do the same.

Michael Litschi, OCTA, clarified that the \$925 million is for improvement to the existing SR-91 corridor. The additional expansion of it is included in the unconstrained OCTA long range transportation plan. He emphasized that currently, OCTA has not identified a funding source. OCTA cannot identify \$9.8 billion to move this project forward.

Richard Dixon, Lake Forest, added that OCTA is cooperating with Riverside; it simply has not identified a funding source for the tunnel. There is potential for a mixed use tunnel that would also move utilities, and OCTA has explored alternatives. OCTA is committed to relieving congestion between Riverside and Orange Counties.

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Jeff Stone stated that Riverside is supporting a tri-tunnel: one for autos, one for trucks, and the other for utilities.

Mr. Ikhrata recommended supporting this project contingent upon commitment from OCTA and RCTC between now and the time the RTP is adopted. SCAG would like to keep this project alive since it was in the 1998 RTP. Mr. Wapner agreed this was appropriate and at the next workshop on finance, we should come up with a source of funding.

Policy Discussion Matrix: Project #5: I-5 HOV and Truck Lanes

SCAG staff recommended moving the HOV and truck climbing lanes on I-5 in Santa Clarita forward to the RTP. There is a \$10 million commitment from Metro. Benefits include increasing capacity, relieving congestion, improving public safety, expanding the HOV network, and facilitating movement of trucks on a major truck corridor. The Project also has federal support with a \$1.5 million earmark. The Mayor Marsha McLean, Santa Clarita, expressed strong support to improve the corridor.

Rose Casey, Caltrans, pointed out that the project will make improvements to both passengers and trucks, and based on studies, this project performs well on the return of investment. The project is unique since it will receive significant dollar contributions from private developers formed through the I-5 Golden State Gateway Coalition.

Mr. Wapner concluded that since there was no major opposition to the project, it will proceed forward to the draft RTP.

Policy Discussion Matrix: Project #6: US-101 Corridor

SCAG staff recommended that this project be included in the Strategic Plan and be further studied. There is zero commitment to the project. This project proposes the construction of two HOT lanes in each direction from the Ventura County Line to SR-134/SR-170 to increase capacity, relieve congestion, and address inter-county commutes.

Helene T. Bibas, LA City Planning, commented that this project is the only urban freeway on the matrix and that it should be kept in the RTP regardless of the political community. The community already has transit and she urged to keep it in the RTP so that further studies can be pursued.

Others argued that this is the only project related to the US-101 Corridor; if it gets left out of the RTP, there will be no improvement plans for the US-101.

Dennis Washburn, Las Virgenes-Malibu COG, stated it is a good time to look at mobility patterns of US-101 and if this is the only way to fund it, it should be included in the plan.

Rose Casey is aware of a Caltrans study that looked at adding a HOV lane in each direction and re-striping north of Valley Circle to the Ventura County Line to add an additional mixed-use lane, which is low-cost. She suggested looking into this as an alternative instead of the proposed project.

A member suggested the possibility of re-evaluating the magnitude of the project.

Richard Dixon, City of Lake Forest, warned that if the Region maintains this project in the RTP and it cannot come up with funding, SCAG will have to replace it with another project that has an equal benefit; otherwise it will jeopardize federal funding for the entire region.

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Mr. Wapner agreed to include this project in the RTP subject to Caltrans and the commissions getting together to come up with a modified approach to a funding commitment.

Mr. Wapner summarized that everything that was in the 2004 RTP stays in the RTP, in addition to other projects that have no identifiable sources of funding.

Regional Comprehensive Plan

Larry McCallon, Highland, CEHD Vice Chair, opened by saying that the purpose of the discussion was to set the stage for next month's review of preliminary draft of RCP where the CEHD will be asked to consider comments from the EEC and TCC and potentially approve the release of the draft RTP for public review. The RCP is a major plan that represents the culmination of debate, discussion, and consensus about the path forward for our region. RCP looks holistically at the challenges for our region and find ways to balance natural resource conservation, healthy economy, and promote a better quality of life. The RCP is an attempt to address how to deal with problems as an Agency with little direct authority; beginning with regional dialogue.

Doug Kim, SCAG, lead the discussion on the RCP. A draft RCP document was distributed for review. Mr. Kim emphasized that the RCP is merely an advisory document that makes recommendations and ties together SCAG programs. The RCP is born out of the Compass Blueprint program. Mr. Kim broke the document into three policy areas: identification of best practices; amending current regulations; improved coordination. The RCP is an attempt to address how to deal with problems as an Agency with little direct authority. The answer is to begin the regional dialogue.

Jacob Lieb, SCAG Acting Manager of the Environmental Planning Division, stated that the RCP is on the same schedule as the RTP. RCP tries to look at the bigger picture and find ways the region can improve the quality of life for the future.

Richard Dixon, OCCOG, raised the question of tying EIRs together for both the RTP and RCP. At what stage does this conversation get elevated higher than a subcommittee? His opinion is that RCP is not subject to EIR as a voluntary plan.

Mr. Lieb clarified that the current plan is to move forward a Program EIR in a month that follows the Draft RTP. The Regional Council will hear the recommendation on the approach for the EIR at its November meeting.

An individual was concerned that if the EIR is not required for the RCP, why constrain it by going through the EIR process and spending money.

Mr. Lieb stated that while the City of Lake Forest suggested it may not be a project of CEQA and not require an EIR, that SCAG legal analysis came to a different conclusion and SCAG committed in having a consultation with Lake Forest and Orange County prior to next month. [An individual disagreed with this comment and called it misleading]

Mr. Ikhrata stated that if SCAG does not have to perform an EIR, it will not waste money doing so.

Councilmember Margaret Clark, Rosemead, announced that she abstained during the morning's EEC vote and emphasized that it was not vetted fully yet.

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Richard Dixon asked two questions: 1) why did SCAG expand the RCP from five to nine chapters, and 2) How was the RCP used last time around? Doug Kim answered that in 2004, the RC expanded the scope of the RCP to what it is today.

Councilmember Clark and several other members expressed deep concern with the timing of approving the document.

Another individual expressed concern that SCAG and the RCP was overstepping its boundaries.